Reassigning Meaning, by Simi Linton

Quotes and Paraphrases

1. “Over the past century the term *disabled* and others, such as *handicapped* and the less inclusive term *crippled*, have emerged as collective nouns that convey the idea that there is something that links this disparate group of people. The terms have been used to arrange people in ways that are socially and economically convenient to the society.” (223-224).
   1. In the past century, the term “disabled” and others alike have been used to describe a group of very dissimilar people. The terms “crippled” and “handicapped” have been used to suit society.
2. “There are disagreements about what it is that unites disabled people and whether disabled people should have control over the naming of their experience” (224).
   1. It is debated whether or not disabled persons should be able to name their own group and what it is that even makes those people a group.
3. “They [terms like physically challenged and handicapable] convey the boosterism and do-gooder mentality endemic to the paternalistic agencies that control many disabled people’s lives.” (226).
   1. Terms like “physically challenged” and “handicappable” were created by people with good intentions but not enough courtesy to allow freedom to those disabled persons.
4. “The compliment [I never think of you as disabled] has a double edge. To accept it, one must accept the implication that the group is inferior and that the individual is unlike others in that group.” (228).
   1. Telling a disabled person they act as if they don’t have a disability, is like telling that person they are lower in class but they act as if they belong to the higher class.
5. “If we, as a society, place the onus on individuals with disabilities to work harder to “compensate” for their disabilities or to “overcome” their condition or the barriers in the environment, we have no need for civil rights legislation or affirmative action” (229).
   1. If there is a burden for persons with disabilities to work more vigorously to pay for their disabilities or to end their conditions, we might as well have no civil rights.
6. “It is not surprising that disabled people also speak of “coming out” in the same way that members of the lesbian and gay community do.” (230).
   1. It is not shocking to hear that persons with disabilities talk of “coming out” the same way members of the LGBT community do.
7. “Normal and abnormal depend on each other for their existence and depend on the maintenance of the opposition for their meaning.” (231).
   1. One cannot have normality without abnormality because they depend on each other for meaning.
8. “Some of the stereotypes that are particularly entrenched are that people with disabilities are more dependent, childlike, passive, sensitive, and miserable and are less competent than people who do not have disabilities.” (232).
   1. Some descriptions infringe upon persons with disabilities, saying those people are more relying, immature, easily pained, and unhappy and are not as intelligent as people without disabilities is stereotyping.
9. “Disabled people are frequently described as *suffering from* or *afflicted* with certain conditions. Saying that someone is *suffering from* a condition implies that there is a perpetual state of suffering, uninterrupted by pleasurable moments or satisfactions. “ (232).
   1. To say that a person with disabilities is “suffering from” is like saying a person is constantly in pain without happiness.
10. “Rather than assume suffering in the description of the situation, it is more accurate and less histrionic to say simply that a person *has a disability*. Then, wherever it is relevant, describe the nature and extent of the difficulty experienced. My argument here isn’t to eliminate descriptions of suffering but to be accurate in their appointment.” (233).
    1. An alternate to assuming that a person with a disability is constantly in pain, it is better to describe their state and what that person feels. Rather than eliminating statements of illness, the description of their state would be more correct without stereotyping that person.

Linton, Simi. “Reassigning Meaning.” *The Disabilities Studies*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis. Third ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 1997. 223-236. Print.